BATTLE OF BREITENFELD 1631

September 17

First Battle of Breitenfeld (in older texts sometimes known as Battle of Leipzig), was fought at a crossroads near Breitenfeld approximately 8 km north-west of the walled city of Leipzig on 17 September (Gregorian calendar), or 7 September (Julian calendar, in wide use at the time), 1631.
It was the Protestants' first major victory of the Thirty Years War.

Slideshow Anders Dernback – text Wikipedia

BATTLE OF BREITENFELD (1631)

Date 7 September (O.S.)
17 September 1631 (N.S.)
Location
Breitenfeld, Electorate of Saxony
(today part of Leipzig, Saxony, Germany)
Result: Decisive Protestant Swedish/Saxon victory

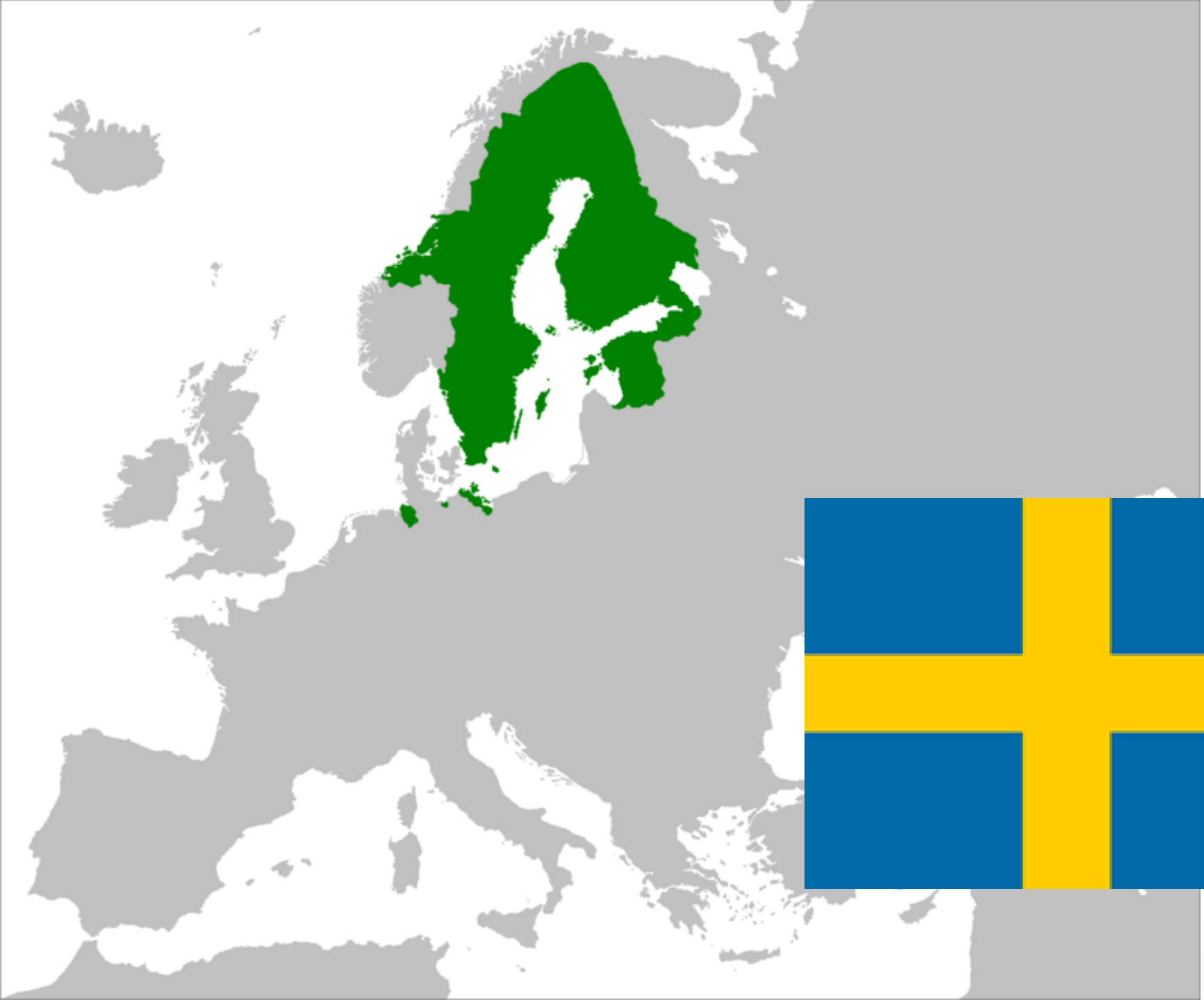
Total: Unknown 3,550 Swedes dead 2,000 Saxons dead	Total: 27,000: 7,600 dead 6,000 captured 3,000 wounded 3,400 missing

Strength

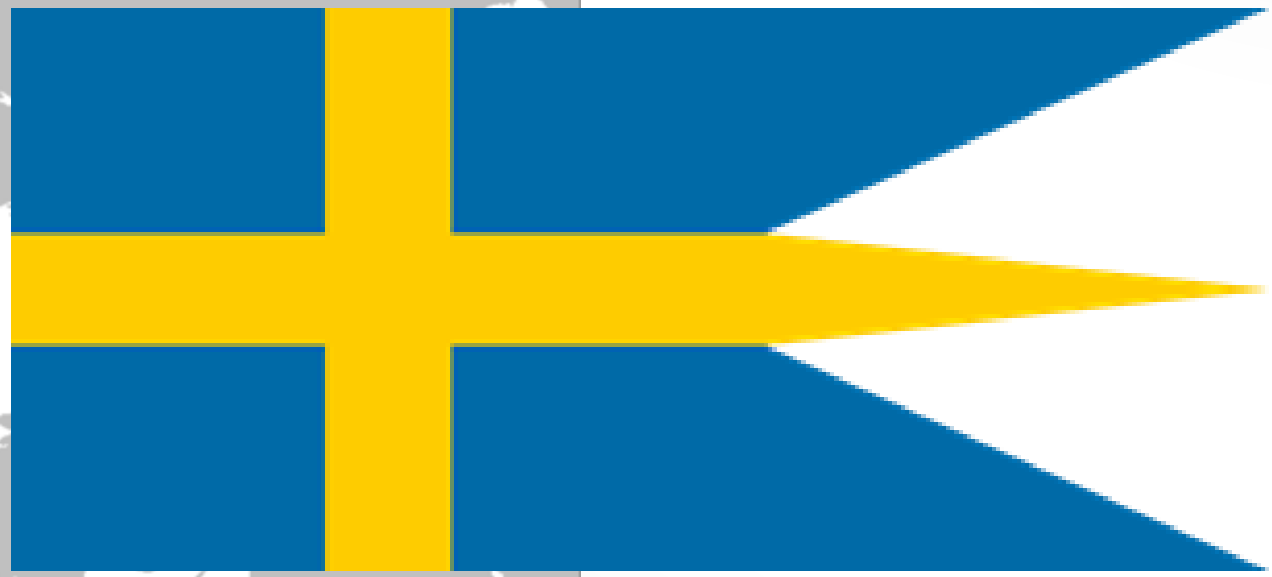
23,000 Swedes
18,300 Saxons
28,750 men present at Breitenfield

11,319 Musketeers
4,812 Pikemen
8,700 Horsemen
3,928 officers

35,000 men Holy Roman Empire



The Swedish Empire at its height in 1658, with overseas possessions not shown



Saxony in 1618, at the war's outbreak.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF SWEDEN AND ITS EMPIRE FROM 1560 TO 1815

The victory confirmed Sweden's Gustavus Adolphus of the House of Vasa as a great tactical leader and induced many Protestant German states to ally with Sweden against the German Catholic League, led by Maximilian I, Elector of Bavaria, and the Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand II.

The Swedish phase of the Thirty Years War began when Gustavus Adolphus and his force of 13,000 landed at Peenemünde in 1630. Initially, Sweden's entrance into the war was considered a minor annoyance to the Catholic League and its allies; his only battles to this point had been inconclusive ones, or fought against generals of modest military ability.

Consequently, the Imperial Commander of the German Catholic League, Tilly, did not immediately respond to the arrival of the Swedes, being engaged in northern Italy.[4] However, the effective end of the Mantuan War in 1631 ensured that the large Imperial army previously tied up there was now free to move into the German states

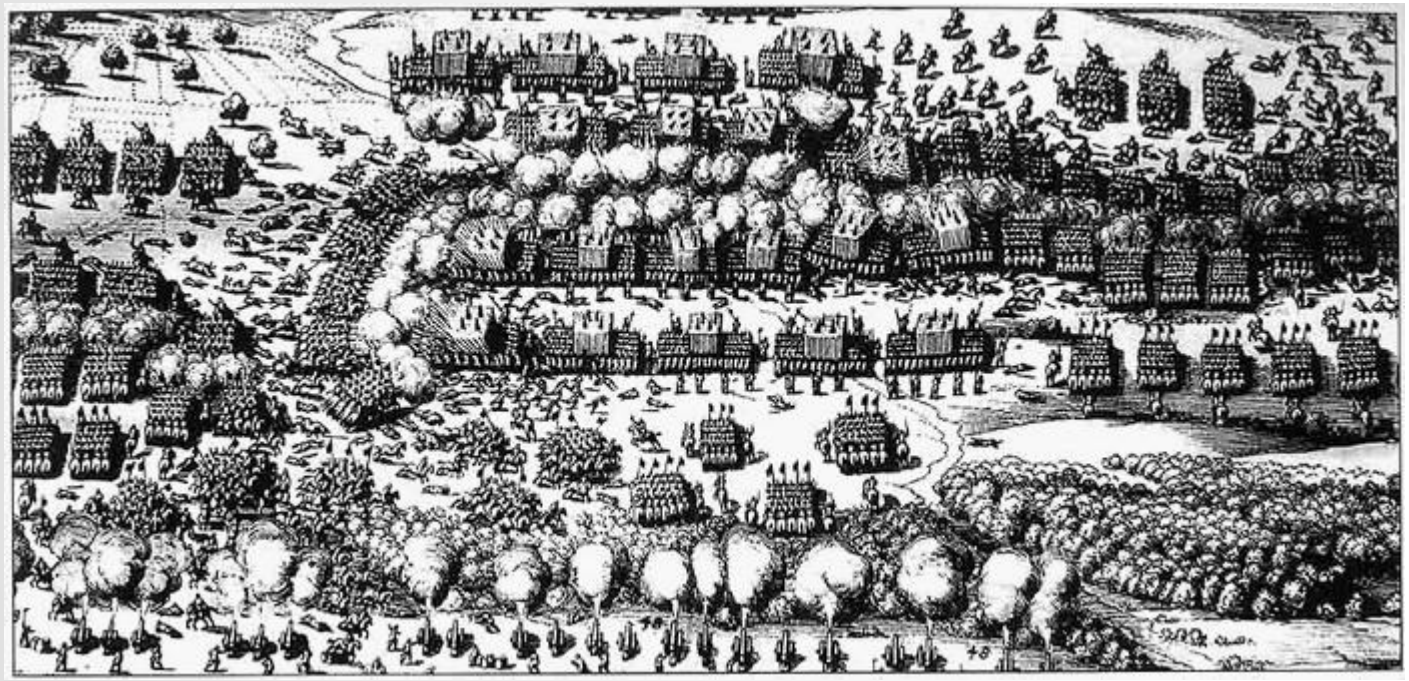
When the Protestant princes showed little interest in attaching themselves to the Swedish cause, Gustavus opted for “rough wooing. His troops moved south into Brandenburg, taking and sacking the towns of Küstrin and Frankfurt an der Oder. It was too late and too far to save one of Gustav's “occupied” allies, Magdeburg, from a horrific sack by Imperial troops, beginning on 20 May, in which a major portion of the population was murdered and the city burned. The Swedes turned the sack of Magdeburg to good use: broadsides and pamphlets distributed throughout Europe ensured that prince and pauper alike understood how the Emperor, or at least his troops, treated his Protestant subjects.

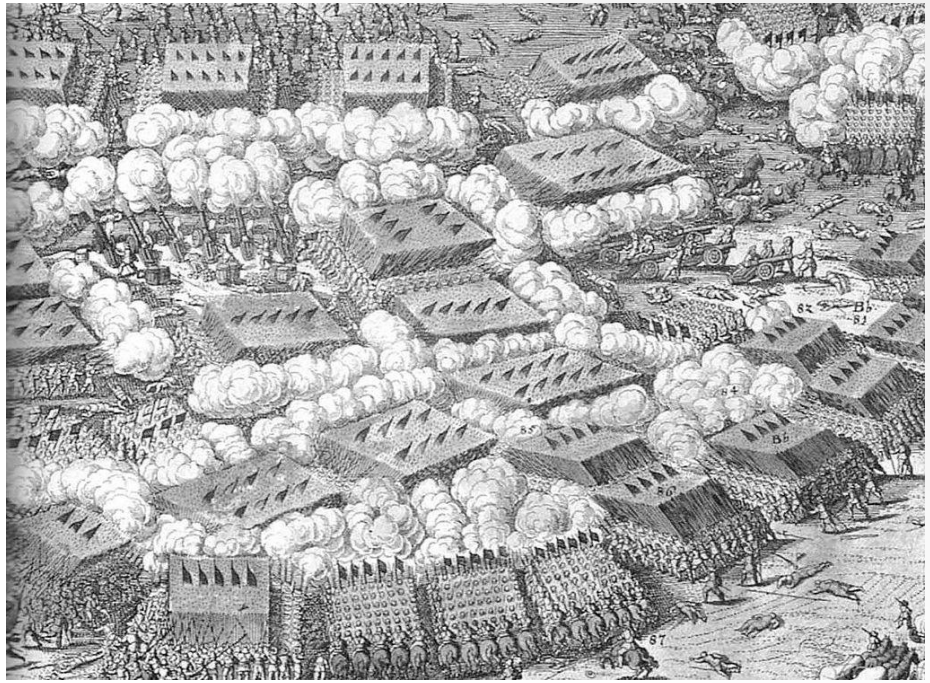
Over the next few months, Gustavus consolidated his bridgehead and expanded across northern Germany, attracting support from German princes and building his army from mercenary forces along the way. By the time he reached the Saxon border, his force had grown to over 23,000 men.

Strategic importance of Saxony

In order for Swedes to attack the Imperial troops in the south, they needed to pass through Saxony. In order for Tilly's forces to attack Gustav's army, they too needed to pass through Saxony. The Electorate of Saxony had not been affected by war and had large quantities of resources that each army could utilise. In midsummer, General Tilly asked John George I for permission to pass through the territory; the elector declined permission, noting that Saxony had not been ravaged by war yet. Later Tilly invaded the Electorate of Saxony due to the fact that it was the shortest distance between his army and Gustav's and it possibly annulled the chance of a potential alliance between Saxony and the Imperials.

His plan was to avoid contact with the Swedes, and ultimately the Saxons, until his troops could unite with the units near Jena (about 5,000 seasoned professionals), and the larger force of Count Otto von Fugger, en route from Hesse. Gustav and John George united their forces, planning to meet Tilly somewhere near Leipzig.

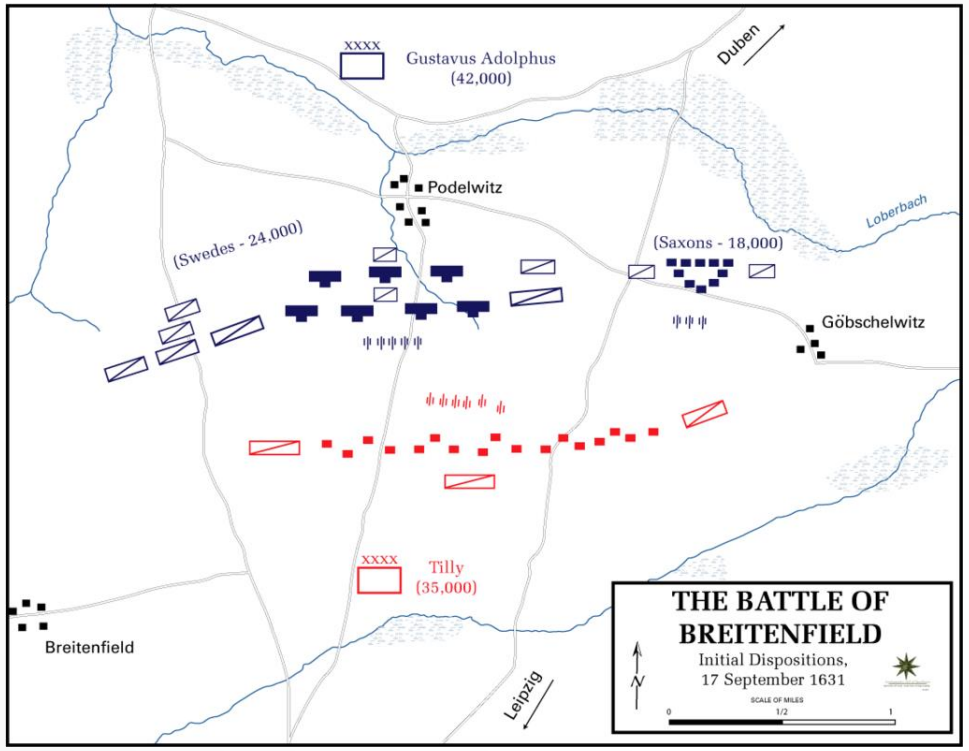




The forces deployed were roughly equal in strength with the Swedes being slightly outnumbered. The Protestant coalition fielded about 42,000 troops (18,000 of them German), and the Imperial army about 35,000. The Protestants had a considerable edge in cavalry numbers, about 13,000 (5,000 from Allies) to 9,000. Strength of heavy artillery was comparable, with the Swedes having a slight edge in quality and Imperial forces a marginal advantage in quantity. The Swedes had additional small artillery pieces (3 and 6 pounders) integrated into their infantry brigades and regiments, giving them a larger number of tubes overall and a huge firepower advantage in an infantry clash.

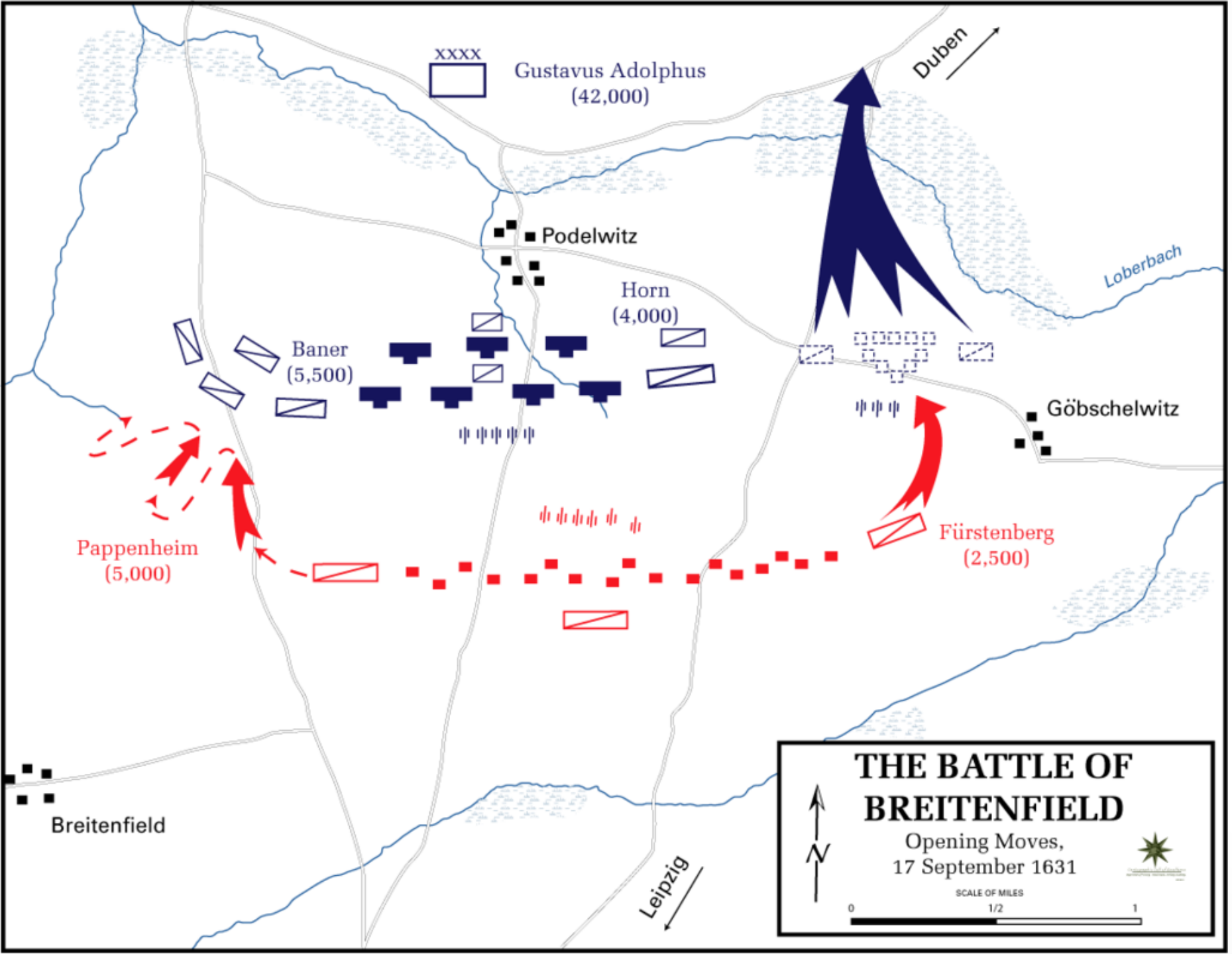
The Imperials had a considerable advantage in the number of trained infantry deployed, about 25,000 to the Swedes 15,000. The Saxons (Swedish allies) fielded about 9,000 untrained conscripts and militiamen, and had very few muskets. The Swedish brigade had more muskets and fewer pikemen than the Imperial tercios (who still retained large numbers of lighter firearms known as the arquebus or caliver); overall, the Protestants fielded about the same number of muskets as Imperial troops.

The Swedes deployed their 15,000 infantry in brigades and two lines. The imperial army deployed 25,500 infantry in a single line of 17 tercios (1,500 infantrymen in each).

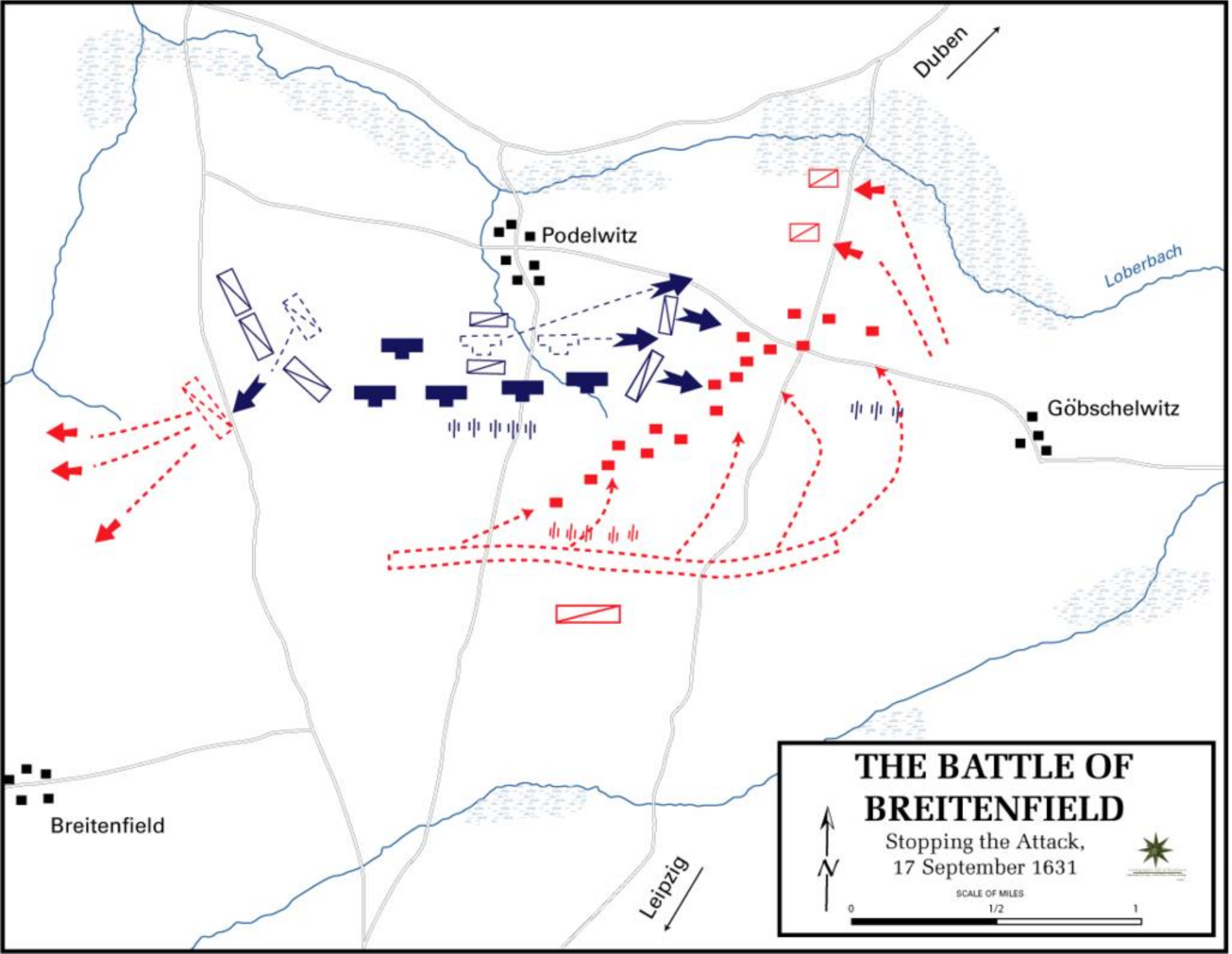


Battle of Breitenfeld – Initial dispositions, 17 September 1631 Swedish-Saxon forces in Blue Catholic army in Red

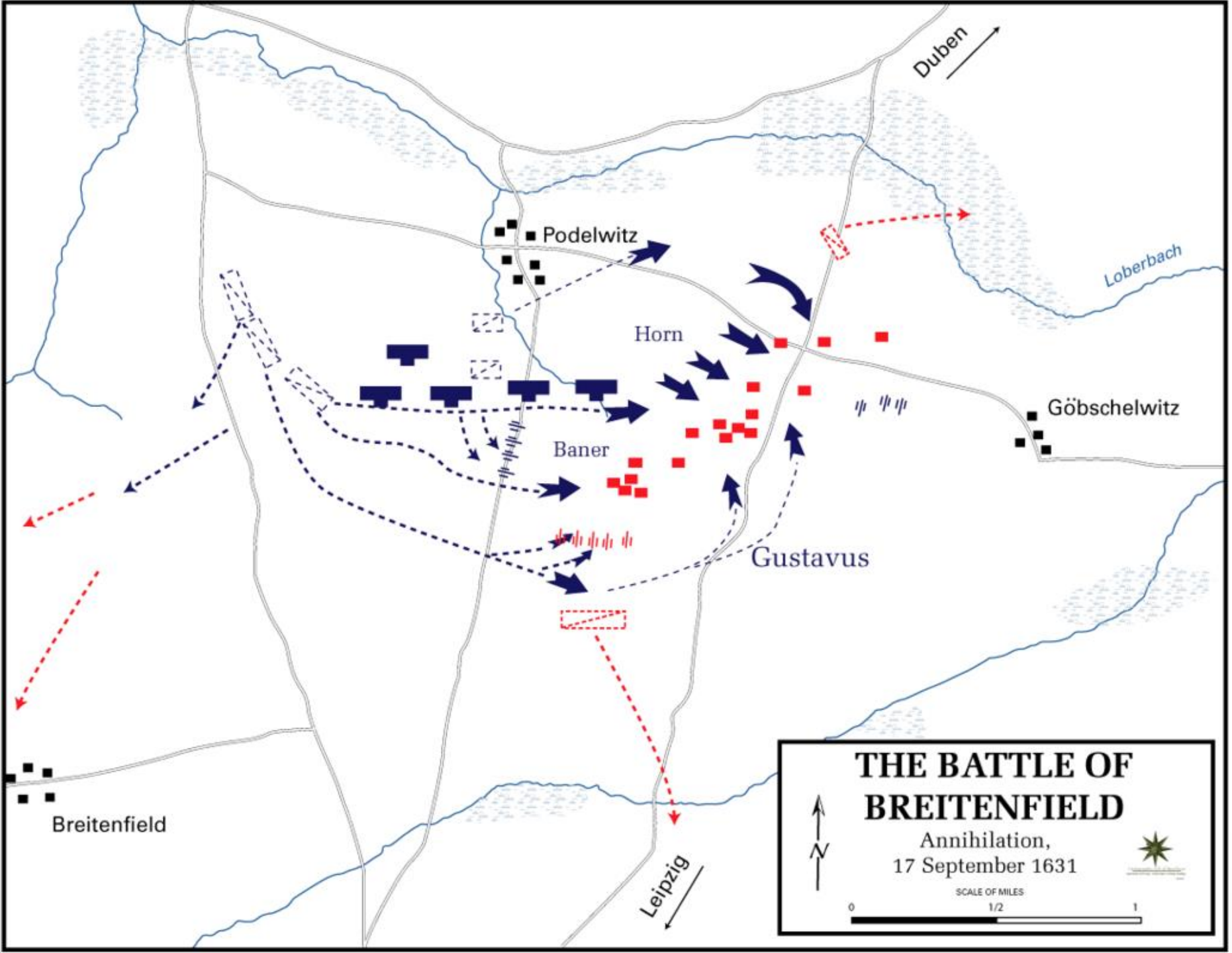
Battle of Breitenfeld – Opening moves, 17 September 1631 Swedish-Saxon forces in Blue Catholic army in Red



Battle of Breitenfeld – Thwarting the Imperial attack, 17 September 1631 Swedish forces in Blue Catholic army in Red



Battle of Breitenfeld – Annihilation, 17 September 1631 Swedish forces in Blue Catholic army in Red



Annihilation of the Imperial Force

With the Imperial forces engaged, the Swedish right and centre pivoted on the refused angle, bringing them in line with Horn. Banér's cavalry, under the direct command of Gustavus Adolphus, attacked across the former front to strike the Imperial left and capture their artillery. As Tilly's men came under fire from their own captured batteries, the Swedish cannon, under Lennart Torstensson, rotated, catching the tercios in a crossfire.

After several hours of punishment, nearing sunset, the Catholic line finally broke. Tilly and Pappenheim were both wounded, though they escaped. 7,600 Imperial soldiers were killed, and 6,000 were captured. The Saxon artillery was recaptured, along with all the Imperial guns and 120 regimental flags.

Electoral Saxony within the Holy Roman Empire upon the 1648 Peace of Westphalia